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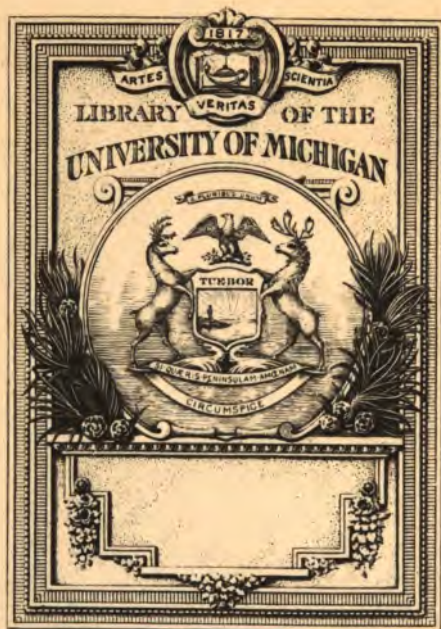
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AN APPEAL

FOR

Social Purity in Negro Homes.

A TRACT.

BY EUGENE HARRIS.

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, APRIL, 1898.

H.B.
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p. 18

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

This little tract is a modified excerpt from a sermon preached at Fisk University sixteen months ago, and afterwards to other audiences. I publish it primarily to put it into the hands of the young people among whom I labor, because I love them, and because I hope, although it be in a blind and imperfect way, to put them upon their guard against the social evils that beset them.

As a people, we have had less than forty years' experience in building homes and erecting family altars; and consequently, it is not surprising if social immoralities are too frequent, not to say *rampant*, among us. Nothing has caused me more pain, I can even say mental anguish, than the contemplation of the social status of the colored people, not merely as I have read of it, but as I have seen it, and known it, and come into contact with it.

This tract is addressed mainly to young women, not because young colored men do not have their full share of responsibility in the social regeneration of the race, but for good and sufficient reasons which will appear at the close. It is to be hoped that its publication will do no harm, and at least some good.

EUGENE HARRIS.



AN APPEAL FOR SOCIAL PURITY IN NEGRO HOMES.

Throughout their national history the people of Israel kept themselves comparatively exempt from the heathen about them: and even in their Egyptian bondage and their Babylonian captivity, unlike many other subjugated peoples, they retained their identity and refused to amalgamate. It is remarkable how many calamities befell the Hebrew nation through the alliances, either of their kings or of the people at large, with infamous women about them. Because of their connection with the Moabitish women, a large number of the people were slain, and "their heads were hung up before the Lord against the sun." On account of their alliance with the women of Midian God sent a plague upon Israel and slew twenty-four thousand men. Samson's marriage with the Philistine woman at Timnath in opposition to the wishes and appeals of his parents was the occasion of a long series of disasters both to himself and to his people. David's alliances with heathen women were the source of most of the treason, and plotting, and jealousies, and discord, which took place in his home and his court. Had it not been for Solomon's harem with his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, many, and perhaps most of whom, were of foreign extraction, the kingdom would have never been divided, and Israel would not have been disrupted by political and religious revolutions. Had it not been for the infamous Jezebel, Ahab would not have been involved in political murders and gross idolatries, and Elijah would not have had occasion to slay four hundred prophets of Baal. Again and again, heathen worship with its revolting licentiousness and abominations, was introduced into Israel by the wicked heathen women in the

harems of the kings. Had it not been for the forces of evil which their idolatrous practices set into operation, the ten tribes would not have been lost; perhaps, would have never gone into Assyrian captivity. Even as late as the close of the Babylonian exile, Nehemiah himself expressly says that he contended with and cursed the people "because they followed Solomon in marrying outlandish women and strange wives."

The social conditions existing among the heathen in Old Testament times cannot be better set forth than in the first chapter of Romans. On the other hand, the purity of the Hebrew women, and the social, and religious, and even political position which they held in the Hebrew Commonwealth stand in striking contrast with the status of their heathen sisters. And here, let us set forth this truth, that *the status of any people can be largely determined by the status of its women*. No race has ever occupied, and no race does or ever will occupy, any more advanced place among the nations than its women will allow it. One might judge beforehand that a race that produces prophetesses like Miriam, female judges like Deborah, mothers like Hannah, and beautiful examples of devotion like Ruth, would be far ahead of any contemporaries that were lacking in these characters. In all ages of the world, the character of a people's women has been a pretty true index to the character of the people itself: and, young women, it should be more than a female boast, it is a great responsibility, that women make society. If it be true (and I think that it is only partly so), as is often asserted, that women make society, what a blunder they made at Rome when society was a mass of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; when incest was common, when harlotry was public, and when God gave them up unto vile affections, and unto uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts.

The future of the colored race in America—and I am not your enemy, young women, because I tell you the

truth—lies largely in the hands of its women. The sentiment, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world," is just as true among the colored people as among any other: and if Rome was destroyed because the empire had no mothers, and if France underwent the horrors of the revolution because the institution of the family was obliterated, if Ethiopia be guilty of the same immoralities, there is no special dispensation of Providence to save her from the same fate.

I wish to make no railing accusation. In fact I wish to avoid even the appearance of making it. But I do wish to call attention to a somewhat prevalent sentiment which is sometimes publicly expressed—a sentiment which I hope is false, and against which I sound a note of warning lest it should be found to be true. The deplorable fact is that men of good judgment, and honest, unprejudiced motives, have spoken not only in private conversation, but in published articles of the moral laxity in colored homes. There is not a young colored man, with the instincts of a man, whose blood does not tingle when he hears such a charge made, and who is not anxious to denounce it as false. Every young colored man, properly constituted, feels it as a keen reproach; and while he will do what he can to prove that the charges are slanderous, he wants the young women to help him by avoiding even the appearance of evil, and by living above even the shadow of suspicion.

Our young colored men are as chivalrous toward their women as those of any other race. *But even the prowess of chivalry is helpless against the stubborn logic of facts.* And so our appeal is that the young women should take care that the facts are just what they ought to be. Shame to the young men who would not defend to the utmost the fair names of their wives, and mothers, and sisters; and shame to the young women, who by their courses of conduct, make it hard for the young men to defend them.

There are men in this country, and at least one man in Great Britain, who command the public confidence, and who presumably have written with authority upon the Negro question. Some of these books that evince the deepest sympathy for the Negro still contain the most startling and painful conclusions. I quote verbatim: "In one county of Mississippi there were during twelve months 300 marriage licenses taken out in the county clerk's office for white people. According to the proportion of population, there should have been in the same time 1,200 or more for Negroes. There were actually taken out by colored people just three." "I know," says the same author, "whole neighborhoods including hundreds of Negro families where there is not one single married couple who stay faithful to each other beyond a few months, or a few years at most; often but a few weeks."—*Black America*, p. 110. This quotation is but an illustration of many others like it; and notice, I do not now say that there is one word of truth in them. I do not now either confirm or deny the grievous charges which are being published against us. It is sufficient to point out that the charges are made—not by irresponsible parties—but by men of authority and integrity. Some of these charges may be aggravated, and the facts may be distorted on account of race antipathies: but after making allowances for prejudice and overstatement, there remains a considerable amount which cannot be so explained. It is a good thing to open the eyes of the colored youth to the charges which are being made so that they can refute them, or explain them, and so that they can be on their guard against such conduct as gives any ground for them.

If these charges cannot be entirely refuted, they can at least be explained. They arose out of slavery. Much of the moral laxity that exists among us to-day is due to a system which whipped women, which dispensed with the institution of marriage, which separated wives

from their husbands and assigned them to other men, which ruthlessly destroyed female virtue, and which made helpless women the abject tools of their masters. This is the correct explanation of our social status to-day; but to explain it is not to excuse it. It is no longer our *misfortune* as it was before the war. It is our *sin*—a grievous, outcryng *sin*. The times of ignorance which existed before the war God winked at, but he now calls upon us all to repent. Whatever excuse there was for the prevalence of unchastity among colored women before emancipation, it does not exist to-day; and the civil liberty which we enjoy will not avail us much if we make it a license to vice.

The statement is sometimes made that the practice of virtue is quite as common among us as it is among the whites. We have no means of comparison, and so, such a statement we can neither confirm nor refute; but if we are only as good as the whites, then we ought to become better; for we fall far short of the perfection to which we ought to aspire. How far short we are reputed to fall young colored women have no way of discovering, and the young men themselves do not fully realize. Somehow, everywhere, wrongly or rightly, the white people have the idea that the Negroes put a low estimate upon female chastity—that their women, as a rule, do not highly regard their purity: and of this one thing be assured—that where female purity is least esteemed, right there will it be most assaulted. There are no young women in this country who are more liable to insult, and for whom the foul-hearted tempter more often spreads his snares than the women of my own race. Unseen danger is lurking around them upon every side; and as they walk unattended the streets of our cities, hidden pitfalls are put before them. The purity of no class of women is put to a severer test. The chastity of no other women is more often assailed. Renegade men, who would not dare approach the women of their

own race, violate the sanctity of colored homes because they can do it with impunity; because such unholy alliances are free from subsequent entanglements; and because somehow or other, rightly or wrongly, they have begun to believe that their assaults in that direction will meet with the least resistance.

The overtures, and apparently the most innocent attentions from men of the other race, must be met with the greatest reserve; for it often happens that Satan appears among them clothed as an angel of light. What is apparently an innocent concession, or a polite recognition, or an exchange of pleasantries, often turns out to be the first step to infamy and ruin. Shame on the young woman who intentionally takes this step. Shame on the young woman who knowingly opens the way to insulting advances, and who, by thoughtless and unseemly behavior, invites the wiles of the tempter.

There is a criminal *carelessness* in conduct as well as a criminal *intent*, and the consequences to the victim are the same whether she be foolish or wicked. No coquetry whatever should be carried on with any man, but it is especially dangerous when carried on with those with whom social barriers make matrimony impossible. The young woman who so jeopardizes her chastity is lost to a sense of honor, and has no adequate conception of the awful future that confronts her—a future which to most fallen women is without God and without hope in the world. Dante inscribes over his Inferno, "All hope abandoned ye who enter here." Society, partially or impartially, has written the same inscription over the doorway to sexual crimes by women; and the women who begin such lives are generally forced to pursue them, abandoned of men, aliens from God, and hateful to themselves.

Better, far better is it, my sister, that a millstone were hanged about your neck, and you were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that you should take the first

step in that life which goes down to death, and which takes hold on hell. There are hundreds of fallen women to-day who find no place for repentance though they seek it with tears. They expect no restoration, and they become confirmed in their lives and sink into deeper infamy. Society, in self-defense, brands them as social lepers, and puts them outside of the pale of mercy where many, if not most, of them live lamenting and die despairing. Such is the fate which opens up to the woman who begins a life of unchastity.

And now, young women, young men, if what is being published about the colored people of the South is true, unless a great moral change be wrought among us, our destruction is certain and just. Some years ago I said in a sermon at Fisk University that wherever the Anglo-Saxon comes into contact with an inferior race, the inferior race invariably goes to the wall. I called attention to the fact that in spite of humanitarian and philanthropic efforts, the printing press, the steam engine, and the electric motor in the hands of the Anglo-Saxon, are exterminating the inferior races more rapidly and more surely than shot and shell and bayonet. I mentioned a number of races that have perished, not because of destructive wars and pestilence, but because they were unable to live in the environment of a nineteenth century civilization; races whose destruction was not due to a persecution which came to them from without, but to a lack of moral stamina within; races that perished in spite of the humanitarian and philanthropic efforts that were put forth to save them.

To that utterance, let me now add this thought; that where shot and shell and bayonet, and the printing press and the steam engine and the electric motor have slain their *thousands*, licentious men, unchaste women, and impure homes have slain their *tens of thousands*: and I speak the words of soberness and truth when I say that if the charges of sexual immoralities brought against us

are true, unless there be wrought a social revolution among us, the hand writing of our destruction even now may be seen on the wall. The history of nations teaches us that neither war nor pestilence exterminates them so completely and rapidly as do sexual vices. The Tasmanians, the Pacific Islanders, the New Zealanders, and the Maoris have all gone down to the grave because they dishonored their own bodies among themselves, and because God gave them up unto uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts. They have gone the way of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Babylon, and ancient Rome, not by the sword of the enemy, but because God gave them up unto vile affections; for "even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lusts one toward another, men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet." It is the teaching of history that nations of libidinous men and unchaste women are doomed to a speedy destruction. This fact was known as early as Job, for he expressly says that if his heart had been enticed unto a woman, and he had laid wait at his neighbor's door, it was a heinous crime that would root out all his increase.

It is as true to-day as it was in the time of Job that disregard for the sanctity of the home means extinction and death. Wherever the colored people are guilty of the immoralities of which James Anthony Froude and W. L. Clowes, of the *London Times* accuse them, if they continue in them, they will be destroyed by them, root and branch. Rome was destroyed because the empire had no mothers, and Babylon was blotted out because she was the mother of harlots. If it be true, as James Anthony Froude asserts, that the Negroes of the West Indies have so little regard for the sanctity of the family that seventy per cent. of their children are illegitimate,

we may confidently expect that God, at no distant date, will send among them the besom of his destruction. Always and everywhere moral leprosy means physical death.

This tract will fail in its object unless it adds something to your sense of the value of female purity. The price of a virtuous woman is far above rubies; for upon female chastity depends the existence of the family, and upon the family depends the perpetuity of the people. It is impossible to exalt social purity too highly, or to say anything too strong in its favor. Life is very precious indeed, but a life that is sustained by the sacrifice of chastity is not worth the living. Shame upon the woman who does not prefer death to a life of luxury maintained by the price of guilt. Shame upon the woman who barter her soul for dress, and who does not perceive that "the life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment;" who does not know that "a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches and loving favor rather than silver and gold."

I plead for a higher estimate to be put upon female virtue by the women themselves. I want society and the church to draw the line closer and tighter, and I want them to learn that when they condone such offenses, they are imbibing the virus of a moral poison, which will prove disastrous and fatal. If those suffering with leprosy of the body are to be isolated lest the contagion spread, how much more should it be true of those who are affected with leprosy of the soul? And yet, there are women of bad repute, who have lost little or nothing in the esteem of society; and there are women on our church rolls, and active in church work, who have unsavory characters that smell rank unto heaven.

It is the reproach of our people that oftentimes a lapse from virtue creates only a temporary flurry which soon passes away, and the sinner meets with no permanent loss on account of her crime. It is highly probable that

there are among us unchaste women at heart who become unchaste women in deed because they know that social sentiment is weak, and that their restoration is almost certain; women who lapse from virtue because they have the penetration to see that the gossip caused by their sin will be more the spice which society wants for a flat and insipid existence than any real condemnation.

We may lament "the rarity of Christian charity under the sun," but a charity which condones offenses against the home and the family, and which does not punish the offender, is not Christian, but sentimental and maudlin. I denounce that charity in our society which ignores sexual crimes, and gives indulgences to those who follow such lives of sin; and I denounce those churches among us, if any such there be, that divorce religion from morals, and whose pastors as well as members are guilty of shameful immoralities, and who say, in the dishonesty of their hearts, that because they have been born of God they commit no sin. We sometimes have men in our pulpits who are themselves guilty of such crimes and excuse those who practice them—men, "who knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but take pleasure in them that do them."

Some years ago W. L. Clowes was sent to America by the *London Times* to study the Negro Problem. He mentions a colored preacher, who when reproached for his immoralities with the female members of his church, extenuated their guilt by saying that they were but fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that before the end of time "seven women shall take hold of one man."—Black America, p. 112. There are numerous such preachers in this Southland who prostitute church membership so as to make it a license to vice. Some of them preach that they can do no sin because they are born of God, and they continue in their sexual immoralities in order that

the grace of God may abound. The women are much to blame. The church membership of the land is mainly composed of women, and they are largely responsible for the moral condition of the churches. It is a sad fact that when an impure preacher was driven out of a certain Southern city some years ago at the hands of a mob, most of his sympathizers were women, many of whom looked upon him, not as a social leper, but as a martyr and a hero. It is a sad commentary on that city that so many women voted to retain him that he could not be dismissed from the church in the regular way, and his female supporters were so numerous and strong that he was driven from the city only by the violence of a mob. Male members of the church which he disrupted will tell you that if it had not been for the women, it would have been an easy thing to remove him from their pulpit. The women of that church so zealously supported their pastor that his shame was his glory. It is a sad thing that the escapades of such a man, instead of arousing the women to an indignation which socially ostracizes him, too often gives him a reputation for gallantry which he rather enjoys.

My appeal to the women of my race is to remedy this state of affairs. They have it largely in their power: and in the churches, at least, if not in society at large, they are the more to blame. Many of our colored preachers who have "stolen the livery of heaven to serve the devil in," could not retain their charges were it not for the support of the women; women, who too often open their doors to renegade men because they have affable manners and pleasing address. The women have a voice in this country in both church and society, and they ought to use their power for the correction of social evils; for the chastity of the home; and for the preservation of the holiest thing on earth, a pure and exalted female character. I plead for the women of society to drop every member that is infected with moral poison,

